

6 ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES

Alternative work schedules change the times employees arrive at and leave from the workplace. In essence, they are a demand management technique for spreading the demand for work travel over a longer period of time, or for reducing travel demand by compressing the work week into fewer days. Many U.S. employers have already implemented some form of alternative work schedule; a study performed in the late 1970s found that over 12 percent of private sector businesses with more than 50 employees had alternative work schedule options (Nollen and Martin, 1978).

There are three general types of alternative work schedule programs: staggered work hours, flextime, and compressed work weeks. Staggered hours are staged start work times set by employers which allow different groups of employees to start work at different times. Flextime allows employees to set their own arrival and departure times within company guidelines. For example, all employees may be required to be at work between 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. but choose any hours which include this time period. Compressed work weeks allow employees to work more hours in fewer days than the usual eight-hour-per-day schedule. One common option is the "4/40" where employees work four 10 hour days per week. Common direct and indirect effects are summarized in Table 6-1.

SUMMARY EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES ON TRAVEL

Staggered work hours and flextime directly affect work travel times. Compressed work weeks reduce VMT and change travel times. Effects are a function of employer policies, the nature of the work force, and the degree to which peak traffic is spread over a long time period prior to implementation of alternative work schedules. This latter issue is important because many urban areas have peak traffic periods occurring from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. In such areas, alternative work schedules may not produce any noticeable effect on congestion levels.

Direct effects of each of the three alternative work schedule programs are described below.

Staggered Hours

Studies of staggered work hours in Honolulu and New York have shown this strategy to be effective in changing travel times. One recent evaluation of staggered hours in downtown